

**End of Project Review**

**Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF)  
Bangladesh**

**2008**

**Report Prepared for**

**CEF Secretariat  
ActionAid Bangladesh**

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

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|      |                                  |
|------|----------------------------------|
| AAB  | Action Aid Bangladesh            |
| ADP  | Annual Development Plan          |
| CEF  | Commonwealth Education Fund      |
| CSO  | Community Social Organisation    |
| CSR  | Corporate Social Responsibility  |
| DPE  | Directorate of Primary Education |
| EFA  | Education for All                |
| FGD  | Focus Group Discussion           |
| GOB  | Government                       |
| LLBA | Local Level Budget Analysis      |
| MDG  | Millennium Development Goal      |
| NGO  | Non-government Organisation      |
| NPA  | National Plan of Action          |
| NFPE | Non-Formal Primary Education     |
| PTA  | Parents Teachers Association     |
| PPA  | People's Plan of Action          |
| SMC  | School Management Committee      |
| TOR  | Terms of Reference               |
| ToT  | Training of Trainers             |
| TU   | Teachers Union                   |

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Three agencies: Action Aid, Oxfam GB and the Save the Children UK started administering a fund namely Commonwealth Education Fund in 16 Commonwealth countries. As a lead agency in Bangladesh, Action Aid Bangladesh was mutually selected to act as Secretariat. This fund was available for the period April '2002 to June '2008 from DIFID. The core objectives for the fund were identified as follows:

- i. To strengthened civil society participation in the design and implementation of national and local education plan, especially through the support for broad based national alliances and coalitions;
- ii. To enable local communities to monitor spending on education both at national and local levels;
- iii. To support the development of innovative approaches to educating the most marginalized children (especially girls and the most vulnerable) in a way that influences a wider policy and practice.

The project in Bangladesh has reached its conclusion period in 2008. Project End Review is a general requirement of CEF to DIFID. Accordingly CEF Secretariat in Bangladesh initiated this review through hiring Consultants to accomplish the task. This report reflects the findings of the review work completed by the consultants. This short part of the report presents the summary findings of the review team.

### **Summary Findings:**

1. CEF project under review have been found quite relevant adjudged in terms of the aims and strategy set for CEF. Action Aid Bangladesh has earned a distinguished reputation and credibility within the community and their partners for the respective specialized and unique support and activities related to improving the quality education in the country. Therefore, selection of AAB in a vital role of secretariat was relevant.
2. Selection of partners for this project (7 local and 7 national level NGOs) was found to be very appropriate considering the issues of the project. The NGOs selected for this project are from variety of organizational character with high level of commitment and reputation. Even prior to involvement with CEF, majority of the selected organization were highly involved with local and national level interventions in regards to quality education theme.
3. Selection of the national NGOs are very much appropriate considering the first and third objectives set for the project. Each of these NGOs are highly involved in capacity development and strengthening of civil society. Since the early

stages of the government initiative for improving the education system to ensure EFA, these NGOs are actively involved in policy advocacy, campaign and capacity development of the stakeholders.

4. Particularly selection of CAMPE and PPRC was a right decision due to fact that both the organization are active in national level policy advocacy. Advantage of working with these organizations is its level of scale and value of representation and sustainability issue- in respect to their funding situation. This two organization is not very much dependent on CEF funding for their operation.
5. Besides CAMPE network, CEF supported another network emerged during the project period called "Sushikkha Andolon". Although it was not intended by CEF to establish another new national education network, this was emerged out of transformation from primary education budget watch group to its current form.
6. With the support from the CEF secretariat, Parliamentary Caucus on Primary Education was launched. The mandate of this group was exclusively lobbying within government on education related issues. This was comprised of nine Members of Parliament from major political parties. The major focuses for this caucus was advocating that education be declared a fundamental right in the constitution as opposed to a principle, as it is currently stated. This group also worked and created debate concerning education financing priorities in the national budget preparation. Unfortunately due to the changed political circumstances in the country, it was not possible for this group to continue their work. It is expected that this group will start their activities in full shape after the forthcoming national election.
7. The listed local level NGOs is not excluded from this education movement. From their own capacity as local level catalyst, they are also contributing significantly in empowering local communities to involve with planning and implementation of all public and private initiatives on education in particular. All NGOs other than one or two, have long experience of local level community development initiatives. These NGOs were selected considering the most underserved areas of the country. During selection process priority was given to those leading NGOs who have good reputation and well accepted in the community. Particularly all the selected local level NGOs had their activities related to education for their disadvantaged communities. It was also observed that all the selected NGOs have multi dimensional programme interventions in their catchments areas. These NGOs have very good contact with the local people at the same time maintain very good relationship with the government and other civil society.
8. Through various interventions of the CEF partners at the local level, people of the locality are much aware about public and private investment in the educational development. With and without interaction with Community Audit Team, people are making queries on the public expenditures at schools level. It was not possible to quantify the number of people trained on education budget

tracking but in each of the visited field areas, quite good number of people is acquainted with the process of budget tracking.

9. Utilizing the expertise of the national level NGOs, CEF partners arranged orientation and training sessions for the community on the national and local budgeting, why is budgeting and how to monitor the budget implementation. Simple techniques were apply how to analyze budget, how to look at budget in gender disaggregated way, how to analyze allocation of budget in terms of issues related to marginalized communities.
10. Most of the local partners started their work after building rapport with the existing School Management Committee (SMC). This strategy helped them to get information and acquaintance on the status of the education at schools level. With that initiative, NGOs get full access to work with the communities who are involved with schools. At one stage, the NGOs succeeded to strengthened and reorganize the SMCs and PTAs in their locality. This approach to get involved with the schools management was very effective. In one hand it helped to reorganize and empower the SMCs on the other hand it became a very effective tool for making changes in the environment of the educational institutions.
11. Under the coordination and guidance of CEF Secretariat in Bangladesh, The project partners have achieved significant improvement in the field or issues of quality education. The government initiative on EFA may be far reaching, but the way the civil society involvement and voice is raised, it is not impossible to reach the target of quality education. Without any hesitation following activities can be documented as remarkable work from the CEF partners:
  - Empowering and organizing people at both local and national level to build strong alliances for the causes of education. Corporate groups are slowly involving themselves with CEF partners initiatives.
  - Building knowledge base through research and dissemination activities;
  - Organizing training for staff members and other relevant stakeholders as a means for capacity development and creating a strong team of workers and catalyst group;
  - Involvement in policy review, opinion mobilization and influencing national policy and strategy formulation;
  - At present government is in process of planning and designing PEDP-III, Civil society is actively participating in the process;
  - For last few years, NGOs are involved in national budget review and analysis where they are raising their voices. Even at the local level, before national budget are declared, discussions are held through incorporating civil society and their opinions are considered;

- Although budget tracking is not well organized, but even then dialogue and discussions are organized to review the progress. National and local news papers are also showing their interest through their reports and articles;
  - NGOs advocacy on flexible school calendar, mid day school feeding programme, mal practices in teachers' recruitment process, abolishing system of proxy teacher system, free distribution of school text book, physical punishment of children in class rooms has created tremendous pressure on the policy makers and education administration to seriously look into the matters. As a result some of the mal practices have reduced sharply. Some other issues are taking into consideration for policy declaration soon;
  - It is already learnt from various sources that due to the serious and effective opinion mobilization by the NGOs and civil society, big political parties are incorporating and prioritizing the quality education into their election manifesto for the forthcoming national election;
12. Even in loose alliance or networking between CEF partners, they try to maintain good linkages informally or sometimes formally. The national NGOs can play vital role of coordination among the CEF partners. Almost all CEF partners is trying to mainstream the CEF approaches and strategies to their existing ongoing education or development projects. In that case continuous support, linkage and information sharing is essential to sustain the good practices achieved through CEF project;
  13. It is very essential and will be very useful for future, if national NGOs like CAMPE or PPRC or any other take the initiative to document the lessons gained and or good practices achieved through CEF initiative in Bangladesh. In future these documents will be very helpful for future replication if needed;
  14. Quite important and significant numbers of publications, documents, training manual and guidelines, case studies prepared by the partners under the support of this project. Even these documents are widely circulated and disseminated. All these papers are very much related with the education and its quality issues. Continuous initiatives for repeated dialogue or discussions on these of publications are needed to produce impact on the policy making process;
  15. As a part of strengthening civil society lot of work has been made. It was visible that different types of stakeholders or professional groups from the community both at national and local level are now involved with the issues in enhancing quality education movement. But few groups or professionals are still missing from the alliance. They are mainly trade unions, women activists group, legal bodies or activists groups. National level NGOs as their organizational mandate is to create linkage and alliances with stakeholders

group can take the initiative to incorporate these left out powerful group of people;

16. Due to the unpleasant political situation in the country, it was not possible to continue work with the law makers (parliament members). Very soon the political situation in the country will be changed and it is expected that once again parliament will start functioning. CEF partner PET can start its activity with the parliamentarians who are the most important group to influence national policy on education. As we know mandate of the PET is to work with this group on various national issues, therefore it is expected that they will continue their work;
17. NGOs opinion is that they did not get enough time to prepare exit policy. As a result there was no smooth phase out process of the project resulting sudden staff turnover was there who very important vehicle for this project were. They left either from this project or left the job for other employment;
18. Due to shortage of staff or frequent staff turnover at the secretariat, it was not possible to run the functions of secretariat smoothly. Regular and systematic monitoring from the secretariat was not made. Naturally coordination from the secretariat was not very effective;
19. Quite good numbers of intermediary or national / international donor agencies are working in the country. They also provide technical and financial support to the local NGOs for undertaking various education related projects. There is a tremendous need to build up a strong mechanism of sharing or coordination so that they can ensure maximum utilization of resources, avoid duplication of work, build up an unified approach to address the issue of quality education;

### **Conclusion:**

Consultants are fully convinced that within a serious turmoil in the education field of the country, CEF interventions are timely and very appropriate. The results of the work so far undertaken by its partner agencies can be visualize. Participants and civil society is now much more organized and empower with the knowledge on the problem of education, what to do? and how to ensure their rights. The Government machineries both at policy and implementation level are much more receptive towards NGOs and civil society. They show their interest to listen to them and involve them in the process.

Besides lot of achievements and success there still remains unfinished work. The participating NGOs are willing and also running their ongoing programs in the light of the approaches and strategies of CEF projects. They want to run the motor which got its momentum through the initiatives of CEF. They strongly desire to continue their activities with the already organized civil society. In that case it is very essential for them to utilize the good practices of CEF projects. For that reason, they must document the lessons and good practices from the past. Although there is no formal

alliance and coordination between the CEF partners, they can maintain informal sharing and networking for the sake of their interventions and the benefit of their targeted audiences.

CEF partners should review their past activities from where they can identify the undone work for future actions. Local level partners of CEF can initiate a strategic plan for their own organization where they can prioritize the interventions and issues to achieve desired result in the field of education. There still remain more challenging task and adjustment in the programmatic approach for future program to achieve the desired goal. AAB as a resource organization can play supportive role to the local NGOs to help further. In that case national level CEF partners can also assist them for the greater interest in the field.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) programme in Bangladesh was launched in 2002 and was available until June 2008. This programme was a part of 16 commonwealth Countries programme. ActionAid Bangladesh, Oxfam GB and Save the Children UK were responsible for jointly administering this programme. But as part of mutual understanding ActionAid Bangladesh was the lead agency for overall implementation of the programme. British Government provided financial support to this programme through DFID.

At the outset of the programme, agencies involved identified the following three major objectives for this project:

- i. To strengthened civil society participation in the design and implementation of national and local education plan, especially through the support for broad based national alliances and coalitions;
- ii. To enable local communities to monitor spending on education both at national and local levels;
- iii. To support the development of innovative approaches to educating the most marginalized children (especially girls and the most vulnerable) in a way that influences a wider policy and practice.

Seven National/ Dhaka based and seven local level NGOs/ Coalition and or forum were involved in direct implementation of CEF programme through their different approach and interventions. The agencies involved with this programme were:

| <b>National level agencies:</b>                | <b>Local level agencies:</b>                                |
|--|---|
| Peoples Empowerment Trust (PET)                | Uttaran   |
| Other Vision Communication (OVC)               | Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust (COAST) |
| Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)         | Noakhali Rural Development Society (NRDS)                   |
| Power and Participation Research Center (PPRC) | Swabolombi Unnayan Sagstha                                  |
| The Innovators                                 | Zabarang Kallyan Samity                                     |
| Interaction                                    | Wave foundation   |
| Advancing Public Interest Trust (APIT)         | FIVDB   |

As per original plan of the programme, the partnership and its committed interventions have reached its completion period. As part of a general CEF

requirement to DFID, this end of project review has been initiated through external resource persons with the following objectives:

- To learn and share learning from achievements and failures – in order to improve future work;
- To share CEF aims, achievements and most importantly challenges with others;
- To allow internal and external stakeholders to explore CEF work and help CEF to improve the quality of the work;
- To increase CEF accountability to internal peers and external partners.

The strategic approach adopted by CEF was:

- Influencing policy process;
- Challenging existing dominant paradigm;
- Prioritizing needs from the ground and influencing the policy content;
- Monitoring policy implementation;
- Coalition building/institutionalization;
- Enabling environment so that partnership among civil society, NGOs, media, private sector and the Government enhanced.

## **2. METHODOLOGY:**

The review exercise was initiated in May 2008 and it continues up to October 2008. The team consists of two resource persons who have thorough knowledge on quality education aspects, NGO alliance and movement, advocacy and campaign particularly in the field of development. To save time and to cover extensively, the team members sometimes divided themselves to work separately for field study and information collection from different stakeholders as time allocated for this review work was too short comparing the number of agencies involved with the programme. After completion of field level activities the team members jointly reviewed all information and also analyzed the findings jointly. For the work, guidance note for review work prepared by Commonwealth Education Fund were followed to ensure a structured report with all required information. The team adopted the following methodology for the purpose of review:

- Briefing on Terms of Reference (TOR);
- Review of documents and content analysis;
- Preparing schedule for information collection;

- Interview, discussion and meetings with concerned programme personnel of AAB and partners;
- Field visits to the 3 local NGOs programme areas;
- Visited all national NGOs for discussion and interview of key NGO personal;
- Interview and meetings with the programme participants, community people, local government officials and other allied agencies;
- Focus Group Discussions with the primary and secondary stakeholders;
- Workshop with the partners to get their experience, lessons and reflection on the project.

### **3. LIMITATIONS:**

The review team, in spite of the team members' utmost commitment to accomplish the task of reviewing within the stipulated time as per TOR, had to work within serious limitations. The first as the programme period has ended before the review work started the NGO personnel those who were involved in the implementation CEF programme either left the organization or heavily engaged in other activities of the concerned agencies. To get them on board for discussion and interview was a really a challenging task. Secondly the relevant documents of this programme was not timely available for review or in some cases progress reports and other documents on implementation was not at all available for the review team. Despite these limitations, the review team however did not make any compromise with the overall quality of the review work.

### **4. MAJOR FINDINGS:**

Following major objectives were set in the Commonwealth Education Fund- End of project Evaluation Framework. For this review work these objectives were considered as question to look at whether and how far these objectives are achieved by the project. Set objectives are:

- To strengthen civil society participation in the design and implementation of national and local education plans, especially through the support for broad based national alliances and coalitions;
- To enable local communities to monitor spending on education both at national and local levels;
- To support the development of innovative approaches to educating the most marginalized children (especially girls and the most vulnerable) in a way that influences a wider policy and practice;
- Strengthening inter-agency collaboration and internal functioning of the CEF.

## **A. Strengthening Civil Society:**

### **Local Level:**

ActionAid Bangladesh as lead agency of the Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) has been implementing the programme through 7 national level and 7 local level NGOs since 2002. Local level NGOs were selected considering the most underserved area of the country. During selection process priority was given to those leading NGOs who have good reputation and well accepted in the community. Particularly all the selected local level NGOs had their activities related to education for their disadvantaged communities. It was also observed that all the selected NGOs have multi dimensional programme interventions in their catchments areas. For example it can be sited that ZABARANG as a leading NGO working in the remotest hilly area of the country working for social development of the hilly people. Very few agencies are working in that locality. This NGO have very good contact with the local people at the same time maintain very good relationship with the government and other civil society. Similarly SUS in Natrakona, COAST in Bhola (remote island) UTTARAN in Satkhira (remote southern Bangladesh), WAVE Kushtia FIVDB in remote disaster prone area of Sunamganj district and NRDS in Noakhali districts. Working profile of these local NGOs reflects very high involvement with various local level advocacy and resource mobilization activities. These NGOs are also involved with various forums and networking agencies both at local and national level.

During selection process of national level agencies, priority was given to those agencies that have expertise of advocacy, lobbying, research, training, mass campaigning, media connection for the causes of quality education in the country. It was clearly evident that the selected agencies are from variety of organizational character with high level of commitment and reputation. Even prior to involvement with CEF, some of the agencies were highly involved with national level networking activities (CAMPE), leading research work on varieties of national issues (PPRC and INNOVATORS), providing training and developing training materials (Interaction) particularly on education. Some of the agency (OVC) is engaged in training and engaging local and national journalist. PET is particularly working with parliamentary policy group who have big stake in policy change. Considering the mandate of CEF, it is very clear that selection of the agencies for the programme was very appropriate and unquestionable. After selection of the NGOs, CEF secretariat arranged participatory planning process with all these partners. At the beginning, they identified the areas of gap and needs for improvement. On the basis of needs, CEF secretariat provided financial and technical supports to the partners to undertake various activities.

While going through the whole process of end review, it was evident that the local NGOs within their organizational constraints and limitations has tremendously strengthened their capacity to ensure community/civil society participation for local level planning, auditing and monitoring educational interventions. In all the field areas visited by the consultants, it was observed that through SMCs, PTAs and auditing activities, community groups are very

much involved with the interventions of the NGOs. NGOs provided training to the community group and now they are trained and well conversant with the issues related to the education. Formation of community audit teams and their functions, School Management Committee (SMCs) and Parents Teachers Association (PTAs) activities reflects that they are very actively volunteering their time in achieving their desired goals. Few examples can be cited that one of the SMC in Zabarang working area received national award as best SMC. It was observed that this SMC is playing a vital role as local catalyst to improve the situation prevailing in the education sector.

All these 3 local NGOs (visited by the consultants) are also active and implementing several development related programmes. It was clearly observed that, NGOs are slowly mainstreaming the issues of education to their other development programmes. Local community mobilization initiatives of these NGOs are very effective. Community participation at all level is ensured through motivation, awareness raising and training. Shomity (organization of the poor) members are also aware of their children's rights for the education. They are also participating in local budget analysis planning, auditing of educational facilities. It can be specially emphasized that the Shomity members are the real strength of these organization in realizing the rights of the community. The NGOs are in the process of building of community based peoples organizations. At least two NGOs (SUS and COAST) are preparing their participants for graduating some of their Shomities through formation of Peoples Organization. Socio-economic empowerment process of these NGOs is remarkable. Female members of the households are now participating in the family level decision making process, they are now even taking part in decision making for children education. There was a time in rural Bangladesh, when family decisions on children education, marriage, purchasing of assets etc. was the responsibility of male members. Responsibilities of female members of the family were only taking care of family members in terms of cooking, cleanliness, collection of water etc. Now the situation is changed certainly due to the NGOs empowerment and other development programmes. Now these women group of the community are taking care of the education and health of their children within lot of their social and economic constraints. The female Shomity members of the project area are trying to get involved or at least try to collect information on the education and health facilities. In some areas Shomity members are also part of the community audit teams and visit the facilities to create influence for ensuring support services. The most neglected community at the hilly district where Zabarang is working, were found very hardy, dedicated and visionary in achieving their development and rights. It was observed that the people over there are very helpless and deprived of any development. They consider that Zabarang is their heart. They strongly believe that they can change their lives through self movement. Poor group of this hilly area both male and female were found very much involved and participating all the events and interventions of the Zabarang for a meaningful change in the education. The organization itself was found to be very much democratic and ensure equal participation of all primary and secondary stakeholders. Empowerment of the poor community is very vital and has long term implications. These community groups will remain

vigilant and may create constant pressure to the service providers and in particular to the educational institutions for better and quality education for their children.

It was also observed that the NGOs have very close linkage and relationship with the administration. Local elected people's representatives had high impression on the NGOs and they also opined that these NGOs are playing very catalytic role in mobilizing people's opinion. Local government very frequently seeks assistance from the NGOs to get involved the local community on various discussions and opinions for local level development work.

We know local media always play vital role in any local problem and or issues. Local government also gives them importance for getting and mobilizing community opinions in favour of a change. During field visits, Consultant took the opportunity to meet local journalists to get their feed-back on the NGOs interventions as well as on the prevailing issues of education. While meeting with the media group of the localities, it was also evident that the Medias are very active and supportive of the NGOs movement. They are writing regularly on various issues and seems that they are well conversant all the prevailing issues and problems particularly in the field of education. The records, reports and clippings also reflect the findings. In some cases it was found that some of the media personal received training on how to write effective news and features on education from the NGOs.

SUS in Netrakona is maintaining well communication and strong networking with other rights based agencies engaged in the work. Basically they have initiated an informal alliance with other agencies not only for education matter but also for other development matters. Other local NGOs were found actively involved with various local alliances and network. During the course of the work, consultants were informed that, INTERACTION the partner of CEF has arranged training for other local level NGOs with the help from the CEF partners. INTERACTION has widely circulated their training materials, guidelines and flip charts for use of the NGOs who are willing to work.

CSR issues are also not left out from activities of the partners. Partners consider that business people are also very important segment of the community whose involvement is essential. It was remarkable that the corporate/business communities of the locality are not left out of their movement. Consultant had chance to meet with the local business groups. During meeting with the business community, they expressed their solidarity and willingness in ensuring their social and morale support and cooperation towards the movement for quality education. Although the business group still consider this sort of their work as charity, but still their involvement and continued support could make a change in motivation and changed their attitude towards rights based development perception.

NGOs were found very gender sensitive in terms of programmatic and administrative functions. Participation and enrollment rate of girls in Schools is

still very high. But female teachers' recruitment issues still remained a problem. It was evident from visits in schools that ratio of female teachers are not satisfactory. If this ratio continues, at one stage drop out rate among girls will increase. Because, a girl of age group 10-12 deserve motherly care and guidance at schools from a female teachers. Girls of this age group have various physiological issues and problem. For that reasons, during school hours their support is very important. While discussing the issue of female teachers' recruitment, surprisingly some of the government education officials and even SMC members are not in favour of recruiting female teachers. They were showing various administrative issues and problems. This attitude does not support the agenda for reform in education system to make a positive and sustained improvement. So the partner NGOs have more lot to work in this area. Even if we look at the male-female composition of SMC, PTA, Audit Team or Executive Committees of NGOs, the findings on the male-female ratio will be frustrating. At national level, continuous advocacy and lobbying activities are going on this issue. CEF partners (CAMPE, Innovators and PET) are involved in this process. Therefore, more advocacy and pressure at local level is needed in this regard.

As a process of capacity building under CEF support, all the NGOs arranged study tours for the community representatives. They visited some good schools to see the good practices. After returning, almost all groups formulated their own action plans to develop their schools and implement the best practices of others. The Partner NGOs of CEF has implemented the following major activities during the project period:

- Situation analysis in participatory (involving community) manner;
- School survey;
- Local level community consultations;
- Prepare care studies;
- Discussion meetings and press conference;
- Orientation and training for staff members and community stakeholders;
- Inception study and dissemination of information;
- Study visits to best primary schools in the country;
- Sharing and planning for replication of best practices of the best schools;
- Media campaign and orientation for the media personnel;
- Formation of social audit team;
- Sharing on NPA -2 with the community;
- Union education plan/PPA;
- Community audit;
- Review and reflection on the progress of PPA at School and Union level;
- Advocacy on Teacher's recruitment;
- School grade improvement;

- Local level advocacy campaign;
- Networking with government institutions;
- Capacity building of SMCs and PTAs;
- Local level budget analysis through involving community (LLBA);
- Preparing School budget and time budget;
- Advocacy for flexible schools calendar;
- Advocacy for mid-day school meal;
- Cultivating the concept of dream schools;
- Text book and infrastructure construction monitoring;
- Creating voluntary teaching and teachers pool;
- Activities related to rights based education situation analysis;
- Initiatives to increase students' attendance in the selected schools;
- Influencing Upazila Administration to allocate extra budget for school improvement;
- Identify innovative ways of using existing schools assets, etc.

It was assessed that in general following impacts were made after implementation of above all major activities:

- SMCs and PTAs are now very active and playing a vital role for improvement of the education for the children in the areas;
- Schools attendance has increased and majority of students are attentive to their studies;
- Enrollment rate is very high on the other hand drop out rate is decreasing;
- Results in the exams particularly in the public competitive exams are very satisfactory in most of the schools covered under this programme;
- Teachers are now much more attentive in their duties and absenteeism has sharply decreased;
- Transfer rate of teachers has gone down and trend of deputation of the teachers has gone down;
- Civil society are now much aware and united efforts are there to enhance the quality of education for their children;
- Government officials are very alert and cooperative towards NGOs initiatives;
- Peoples are much aware of their roles and responsibility and participating voluntarily in monitoring auditing and creating pressure on the service providers;

- Women's participation at all levels is slowly increasing and Female Shomity members are equally empowered with their male counterparts;
- People are much aware about their rights and the process to bargain to realize their due services and rights;
- Flexible school calendar issue has got the importance at the national level decision making level;
- Mid-day school feeding programme has got its importance for national decision making;
- Local level platforms has been established which may ensures sustainability of the benefits accrued from the interventions.

Overall, Schools in all the project areas of local partners are performing very well in the public competitive exams. School in Khagrachary has been awarded as one of the best school in the region. Similar examples are also available in other areas of partners. While discussing with the local and district level educational authority, they expressed their deep satisfaction with the performance and cooperation of the NGOs visited by the consultants.

Broad success of the local partners is:

- Local authorities are sensitized on the recruitment of teachers and reduces corruption in recruitment;
- Various local civil society forums has been established to involved in advocacy activities related to quality education;
- Local school committees are strengthened and are aware about their role and functions;
- At union level of some NGO areas, community has developed PPA they are implementing the plan gradually. NGOs in that case are providing them support;
- At different project site, social audit conducted on PEDP-II and ADP. The results of the audit were shared with community people;
- Significant numbers of schools have developed their long term development plan.

Limitations of the local level NGOs are remarkable. Local level NGOs are striving for change in an isolated manner. Their connections with the national level platforms or alliances are not very strong. Their voices are hardly reached to the national level planner or activist groups. Although the national level alliances or

forums are supposed to maintain linkages and provide support to the local initiators, in reality the initiatives from national part is not remarkable or significant. Inadequate support or some sort of negligence is observed. Even the NGOs who are working at local level are not maintaining coordination or linkage with other NGOs working under this programme. Lacks of inter NGO coordination and collaboration, rivalry attitude among NGOs, unhealthy completion and duplication of working areas are prominent and visible in Bangladesh. In recent years NGO-NGO relationship are getting stressed and weakened and as a result doubts and confusion are overruling their integrity and pursuing a common goal for a sustainable change in any area of development work. This typical NGO politics or relationship is also exists to some extent within the NGOs under this project.

Process documentation of the local level NGOs are very poor. The reporting system is not regularly practiced or ignored. As a result it is difficult to get information from the NGOs as the programme has already ended before this review. During review work, staff members of the partners who worked for this project are not available or left the job. In that case skilled knowledge base is missing which is a threat for sustainability of this programme. NGO movement and growth of NGOs basically started since 70s. Due to mushroom growth of NGOs in the country, a sense of negative competitions started particularly among the local NGOs. In most of the cases their quality of work and management issues are always questioned. Staff turnover, poor salary structure, recruitment of less qualified and less skilled staff are common phenomenon. As a result one cannot expect skill manpower to be sustained in local NGOs who are very skilled in process documentation. Budgetary constraints are there also in the local NGOs for which they give less priority in documentation work. This is a very generic picture for NGO community in the country.

### **National Level:**

To get clear picture for central level initiatives and its impacts, all the national level NGOs or agencies were visited by the team. Once again it was observed that lot of qualitative and important activities were undertaken in an isolated way by the agencies under this project. Very reputed and leading NGOs were involved and in some case still involved with the theme of this project. Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) is the largest networking NGO and coalition of more than 1,000 NGOs is active for the purpose of education. Its catalytic role is very powerful and well accepted by all sectors. CAMPEs work particularly on the following issues were very effective: introduction of tax rebate policy, free text book campaign, new books for all children, advocacy for flexible school calendar, and advocacy for mid-day meal. CAMPE also initiated a South Asia position paper to influence the international aid partners.

Other Vision Communication (OVC) is very active and popular in mobilizing media for mass awareness raising and policy advocacy. INTERACTION another agency is very reputed organization for publication of various types of education related

materials, training, guidelines and manuals. The Innovators and PPRC the other agencies who are also reputed for remarkable research and policy advocacy matters. People's Empowerment Trust (PET) is significantly occupied with the mobilizing parliamentarian that is lawmakers of the country. They are working with Caucus group for national dialogue and lobbying, celebrate Global action Week, Parliamentary briefings and hand book for the legislators, orientation for the legislators. A remarkable dialogue programme was initiated by this NGO. The theme was Education for All: Fundamental Rights or Fundamental Principles. This has created an immense impact on the legislators and policy makers.

These national entities have published the following quality reports, guidelines and manuals separately and independently as part of their planned activities:

- Encountering Exclusion: Primary Education Policy Watch;
- Scaling Up: Gender Equality in Primary education in Bangladesh;
- Primary Education in Bangladesh: Streams, Disparities and Pathways for Unified System;
- Situation of Primary Education: reflection in mass media;
- Missing Links: Corporate Social responsibility and Basic education in Bangladesh;
- Guideline for Peoples Plan of Action and its Implementation;
- Audio-visual advocacy Resources;
- Case Studies on Advocacy at Grass root level;
- Advocacy Handbook for Grass root level education Workers;
- Handbook for Advocacy to for the quality education;
- Summary of Education for All: National Plan of Action-2;
- Peoples Plan of Action in Bhai-Bhun Chara Union;
- Peoples experience on Primary Education;
- Syllabus and Annual Lessons Plan at Primary education level;

and lot of other publication on research reports and manuals. All these research and publications provided comprehensive knowledge base for the practitioners and policy makers. Through these research and publication, civil society is benefited and opening their sights. But still questions remain whether the civil society can strengthened the role of better budget monitoring and auditing. Issue based Seminar, workshop and symposium organized by the national NGOs are of good quality in terms of national coverage and participation. But the follow up activities are not strong enough to get results of these programme. In most of the cases, local level participation in these programme are left out.

It is well known in the NGO community that these agencies have significant contribution in policy and strategy formulation both at public and private sectors particularly in the field of Education. Whatever improvement in the education

sectors is claimed in the country, undoubtedly these national and local level NGOs has contributed significantly through their multi dimensional activities.

The problems identified through this review is that these NGOs have very little coordination and collaboration. Each of these NGOs is working isolated. At one stage of the NGOs movement (till mid 80s) the NGOs in Bangladesh were very united and had their strong networking. At later stage, slowly due to the changed political situation in the country, fragmentation within the NGOs network and alliances started. Negative attitude, respect, mutual understanding and cooperation is gradually evaporating from the NGO community. Now an unhealthy environment is prevailing within the community.

The purpose of the institutionalizing or alliance building within the CEF partners for greater strength and effectiveness is not remarkable. They are failing to create the conditions for a sustainable movement in the education field. The national NGOs have produced lot of valuable guidelines and manuals for capacity building of the grass root activists or workers. They have also produced various research reports for the practitioners and policy makers. They occasionally arranged training programme for the grass root organization or workers. The consultant find very little clue of use of these materials at local level. It can hardly imagine whether these materials are used by the grass root workers. Production of valuable materials does not ensure the use of the materials. During review work, it was clearly observed that the education workers are in touch with these materials as the project period has finished.

The intention of alliance building among the direct stakeholders under this CEF project is not yet fulfilled. Duration of this CEF project was not very realistic. The challenging task and mission specified in the project document needs more time to build a strong solidarity, uniformity and concerted efforts. However the implementing agencies under this project arranged few Reflection and Planning workshop during project period where they have identified the following big list of lessons learnt by them. These are:

- Most of the participants of different seminars have limited idea about the different initiatives of EFA taken by the government, different agencies, donor and internal education forums;
- More dialogues need to be organized to raise mass awareness and also to influence the policy makers to take special measures for education of indigenous and disadvantaged children;
- There is a big information gap on the various interventions of GO-NGOs and CSOs. This information gap needs to be reduced through more sharing, and interaction;
- Lack of mechanism for reporting, consultation and accountability to the community regarding the operation of GPS, RNGPS and Madrasha;

- A system of 'Proxy teachers' was mentioned in workshop/seminar/sharing meetings;
- Most of the children who have never been enrolled or drop-outs or poor achievers in primary school are from the deprived and marginalized sections of the society;
- Stipend help the poor to getting access but does nothing to address quality;
- Existence of Teacher Unions (TU) is upon UP level but they often play very partisan role mostly concerned with their own petty interest and not for improvement in the system;
- Lack of involvement of Local Government with educational system. Most of them do not know about the UP standing committee on education. But they could play a vital role in this regard as they exist at the bottom layer of the government;
- Informal voluntary groups have been developed in the grass root level. These groups take different initiatives like education monitoring, rally for awareness building, arranging annual sports, day observations, vegetable gardening etc. These groups became able to involve local government and local elite persons in school development;
- Working mentality has been created among mass people;
- Community is being aware of quality education;
- Positive attitude has developed among government officials to work with NGO's;
- It is possible to achieve good result, if people work unitedly;
- Government policies should be widely disseminated among implementing persons and mass people;
- It is Local government should be involved in education sector;
- The government needs to be sincere and committed to eradicate problems regarding education of indigenous people;
- Indigenous children learn easily in their mother tongue;
- School visit has helped to realize not only teacher-student ratio but also need for special but **subject** teachers are essential for smooth functioning;
- Most indigenous people are illiterate, poor and lack awareness. Therefore, they have to depend upon children what they learn in the classrooms. So, the quality of classroom teaching needs to be improved;

- The qualitative difference between model school and general primary school are vast;
- Quality and transparency should be ensured in teacher's requirement;
- Teacher transfer and deputation should be on the basis of TEO's recommendation;
- Presently UP members and Headman village chief are not involved in education committee. As a result they cannot contribute to the school development activities;
- System of 'Proxy Teacher' is a well known phenomenon but which is slowly reducing;
- Present stipend policy creates misunderstanding and scope for corruption;
- Although most of the govt. initiatives are positive but community people are frustrated about its slow pace;
- Sometimes community people mistrust NGO's because of dissimilarities between their plan and implementation;
- People welcome national plan for achieving the MDG's by 2015 but most of them are doubtful about it implementation procedure;
- Families do not have any budget for education in their family plan and children of poor families do not get education materials in time;
- Children need to pay during 'Text Book' collection from school and they are punished if they fail to prepare the lesson;
- Scattered people of different professions have been mobilized for ensuring quality education;
- Positive and negative impacts of stipend program identified;
- Communication system, natural disaster and poverty are great threat to ensure quality primary education;
- Four categories of coastal people have analyzed their annual budget in education sector;
- People have positive attitudes about education particularly women are ahead in this regard;
- Local forums like Gram Uddyog Kendra, Human Rights Protecting Parishad, Human Rights Theatre;

- People send their kids to work due to low of family income;
- Sometimes learners drop out because they cannot afford to buy education materials and pay examination fees;
- It is observed that some children suffer from malnutrition and so finally it is hard for them to go to school;
- Children do not like school due to lack of education friendly environment, adequate space in classroom, and teacher absence;
- Schools remain closed during and after natural calamity but there are no alternative efforts to continue education programs;
- Most of the community people and education officers are unaware of govt. plan although they want to be aware;
- Collection of GOB information and documents is difficult, but continuous effort creates flexibility for that;
- Time of experts is not easy to access;
- Very important social actors group like trade unions and women activists group are still left out from this efforts;
- Co-ordination among the external team members delayed the process;
- Sometimes, informal and friendly approach is much easier than the formal approach to intervene and act in the primary stage of advocacy.

The above list of the lessons gained by the partners clearly shows that still more work is needed to bring the desired results. Particularly involvement of the trade unions is essential as the workers of both formal and informal sectors of the economy are extremely vulnerable group. Available statistics reflects that children of the workers family are largely excluded from the education. Particularly in the urban context, children from this group have very little access or chance to enroll themselves in the primary education. In Bangladesh, workers group is also very strong in creating pressure to the policy makers in the government. Women Activist group are also isolated from this movement. Their involvement with this movement for education will undoubtedly create strength.

More efforts on advocacy work are needed. Collaborative and joint efforts from various networking bodies and alliances can bring positive result rather than isolated efforts. For this reason updated comprehensive information through various research works can provide inputs for effective policy decisions. Besides this CEF initiative, other bi-lateral and multi-lateral donor agencies or development partners are putting their resources for improvement in the education sector through NGOs. Coordination between CEF Secretariat with other

agencies was essential to avoid all kinds of duplication of work and also to strengthen the efforts given for this cause. But for various constraints like individual and institutional priority issues, lack of timely communication, and frequent changes of assigned personals etc. this work was not done.

Strengthening Teachers Union (TU)-SMC-GO-NGO-Civil society collaboration on quality primary education. More Dialogue/seminar/roundtable on Tax Rebate for education and Corporate Social Responsibility need to be organized. More publication of user-friendly version (Bangla) of education related journals and materials are important work. It is also essential to mass sharing and dissemination of MDG related programs/documents published by the CEF partners. Soon after up-coming parliamentary election, Parliamentary Lobbying for pro-children and pro-poor legislation need to be started. More Television talk show on PEDP-2 and budget allocation Issues need to be organized.

Above all findings and information reflects that, both at local and national level lot of work for strengthening and capacity building of civil society has been done in a limited time period of the CEF project. To ensure quality education for all in a desired time period, more initiative and interventions is still needed to keep its momentum. Almost all the NGO partners of CEF have their own programme which is related to education. They are also receiving resources from other sources for these activities. If CEF support is discontinued, they can mainstream the CEF activities with their existing and running programme. But once again, concerted and collaborative effort between CEF partners is essential. To sustain the benefit so far accrued by empowering civil society, continuous motivational work, orientation and training related activities need to be continued.

## **B. Community involvement in monitoring spending on education:**

It is already mentioned earlier that CEF partners have successfully empowered the SMCs and PTAs at their localities. This was a common activity for all the partners to empower these groups. During field visits and meeting with the SMC and PTA members, it was observed that the members are very well conversant on the issues related to schools and education system. In one hand the committee members are involved in the education management issues; on the other hand they are creating awareness and motivating other community members on education. It was observed that, besides SMC and PTA community people are coming forward to assist School management for improving the facilities and services at schools.

Through various interventions of the CEF partners, people of the locality are much aware about public and private investment in the educational development. With and without interaction with Community Audit Team, people are making queries on the public expenditures at schools level. It was not possible to quantify the number of people trained on education budget tracking but in each of the visited field areas, quite good number of people is acquainted with the process of budget tracking. Utilizing the expertise of the national level

NGOs, CEF partners arranged orientation and training sessions for the community on the national and local budgeting, why is budgeting and how to monitor the budget implementation. Simple techniques were apply how to analyse budget, how to look at budget in gender disaggregated way, how to analyze allocation of budget in terms of issues related to marginalized communities.

In hilly area of ZABARANG, local government officials informed the consultants that very frequently community leader's visits their offices to discuss on the issues related to fund use and education status. In Bhola, local partner along with their community succeeded to influence and convince the Upazila administration to allocate extra financial resources for the local educational institutions. In some areas information were available that women and children participated in situation and budget analysis events. Almost all partners have successfully mobilized resources from the community to increase the facilities and services of their local schools. Many other examples can be given to reflect the people's involvement in local level budgeting. With the assistance and support from ActionAid Bangladesh, CEF partners and their other partners are now mobilizing their community and local government to prepare participatory budget for their development. But there was no hard evidence to understand that whether there is practice of monitoring of education budget that is disaggregated along gender lines and issues.

It is already mentioned earlier that as the project period is over well before this review exercise was undertaken. As a result it was really difficult to get authentic reliable information from the field to see the outcome of the project. In some cases project personnel were not available to work with the consultants and in some cases it was also difficult to organize community people to discuss and collect information. However, consultants tried gather information from the community using the reference group of the community. During review work, most of the schools were closed due to Summer vacation.

### **C. Innovative Approaches and Practices for Improvement in Education:**

To begin the work of the CEF, most of the local partners started their work after building rapport with the existing School Management Committee (SMC). This strategy helped them to get information and acquaintance on the status of the education at schools level. With that initiative, NGOs get full access to work with the communities who are involved with schools. At one stage, the NGOs succeeded to strengthened and reorganize the SMCs and PTAs in their locality. This approach to get involved with the schools management was very effective.

Another initiative of organizing study tours to best schools in other areas for the community members by the NGOs were found very effective. Through these visits, SMC and PTA members get motivation and techniques for preparing development plan for their school. After visiting successful schools outside their area, the community people started thinking in different innovative way. They

started employing community teachers, extra coaching for the children who are not coping with regular class, voluntary cash and kinds contribution by the community for the schools, mothers participation to increase children education and enrolment. Communities involvement along with the mothers involvement with the local education system has immensely helped to increase enrolment and particularly enrolment of excluded disadvantaged children. Although community cash contribution should not be encouraged strongly due to the fact that these are role of local government to put forward their contribution from the tax payer money.

At present particularly in education field, strengthening SMCs, PTAs and involvement of community as a whole in regards to quality education is nothing innovative. These are the approaches or strategies NGOs who are practicing for at least last few years. Therefore, we can not argue that these are the innovative approach identified by CEF partners. But even then mothers involvement, children's involvement, involvement of business community, involvement of media personnel with the CEF activities has created very good results and inspiration among the community people.

Poor or lack of documentation by the local partners has always remained a constraint. Once the project is over, it is really difficult to get knowledge and experienced gained from the project. CEF secretariat did not take much initiative to improve the situation. On the other hand there was lack of monitoring from the CEF secretariat. They have not initiated or introduced any structured progress reporting system from which end evaluation or review work will get support. Now it will be difficult for CEF to document any of the good practices to share for future planning or implementation.

#### **D. Inter-agency collaboration and internal functioning of the CEF:**

This objective of CEF or answers related to questions of extent of collaboration and functions are not very encouraging or bright. Information available in this regard reflects that basically the programme was originated centrally outside of the country. Centrally it was decided that 3 partners (ActionAid, Oxfam and Save the Children – UK) will work together to implement and manage the project. But latter stage, Oxfam and SCF regretted to take the lead and act as secretariat. Then, under a Management Committee consisting members from three agencies, ActionAid was assigned to act as secretariat. At the initial stage, 3 members from each agency participated in Management Committee functions. Due to the fact that all the agencies are heavily occupied with their own business and priority, the participation rate in the committee slowly decreased.

A workshop was organized in Kenya from where guideline for operation of CEF and strategies were identified. After this Kenya workshop, CEF locally organized one workshop with the help from CAMPE. Various stakeholders particularly NGOs related to education participated the workshop. This workshop produced good result and analyzed the situation prevailing in the education field. They came up

with some strategies for CEF implementation. The real activities were started in July 2003.

As it is mentioned in the previous para that preoccupations and distinct priority of the agencies involved in the management of CEF Secretariat in Bangladesh, the flow of work of the CEF was not getting momentum. However, ActionAid somehow managing the programme of CEF with the assistance of its partners. Inter-agency collaboration was not getting very momentum due to the fact that frequent changes in the top level management of the respective agencies. During the project period, some times representation of the agencies was very gender balanced and some times the gender status changed. Within the secretariat, staff turn over was another draw back for the project. Frequent changes in coordination and management staff slow down the implementation process. But even then, small group from the management committee always tried to seat together to look into the functions of the CEF Bangladesh. At the top level, chain of communication was not very strong.

Nothing special in terms of strong and collaborative partnership example has created by the member agencies. No example of innovative or attractive joint management issues or aspects was found while reviewing the documents and discussing with the personnel engaged earlier or working at present. Therefore, no evidence or proof can be recorded for learning of other development partners that can be adopted this sort of mode of fund management and or coordination. It was not possible for the consultant to look at the budget management and financial transparency status due to the fact that this task was not included in the TOR of the consultants. Project documents, strategy papers or even report is not sufficient to review how the budget was spent and how the organizations or secretariat has spent the money for the project.

During the course of project period and in regards to major decisions for the CEF, members jointly took decisions particularly on NGO selection, budget reviewing etc. But till the end of the project, monitoring of the CEF activities was not very strong. There was no structured and systematic way of monitoring developed. One Monitoring Officer was recruited at the beginning of the project but at some point he was terminated for some administrative reasons. After that termination no one was recruited to do the job of monitoring. As a result concerned CEF partners implemented the project as per their own way which was not very healthy for a consistency performance. In absence of strong and structured monitoring, knowledge transfer among the partners was not very strong or regular particularly at national level.

From the secretariat, consultant received the information that, with the participation from the partners, CEF developed an exit strategy. But the partners in the reflect session declined to endorsed this information. They expressed their dissatisfaction to get sudden information on project closing.

## **CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **Conclusion:**

Five years after the official start of the project, it can be concluded that the major part of the objectives set for this CEF project have to a large extent been achieved. Consultants are fully convinced that within a serious turmoil in the education field of the country, CEF interventions are timely and very appropriate. The results of the work so far undertaken by its partner agencies can be visualize. Participants and civil society is now much more organized and empower with the knowledge on the problem of education, what to do? and how to ensure their rights. The Government machineries both at policy and implementation level are much more receptive towards NGOs and civil society. They show their interest to listen to them and involve them in the process.

Besides lot of achievements and success there still remains unfinished work. The participating NGOs are willing and also running their ongoing programs in the light of the approaches and strategies of CEF projects. They want to run the motor which got its momentum through the initiatives of CEF. They strongly desire to continue their activities with the already organized civil society. In that case it is very essential for them to utilize the good practices of CEF projects. For that reason, they must document the lessons and good practices from the past. Although there is no formal alliance and coordination between the CEF partners, they can maintain informal sharing and networking for the sake of their interventions and the benefit of their targeted audiences.

CEF partners should review their past activities from where they can identify the undone work for future actions. Local level partners of CEF can initiate a strategic plan for their own organization where they can prioritize the interventions and issues to achieve desired result in the field of education. There still remain more challenging task and adjustment in the programmatic approach for future program to achieve the desired goal. AAB as a resource organization can play supportive role to the local NGOs to help further. In that case national level CEF partners can also assist them for the greater interest in the field.

### **Recommendations:**

1. At national and local level the project has actively sought cooperation from all relevant stakeholders which include civil society at large and played an important role in various alliances and networks that were to exchange experiences, create knowledge and to influence for policies and priorities of the GOB. However, the project has realized that effectiveness of such alliance building is rather not very strong enough and sustainable. National level partners of this project with technical support from AAB and cooperation from local level NGOs may continue the effort. National NGOs have their mandate of networking and collaboration for which they can continue the work in a sustainable manner;

2. At local level, various strategic partners have been identified and cooperation achieved. The fact that many more influential partners now work closely with this project creates a certain level of awareness and familiarity with the objectives and strategies of this project. This favourable and effective atmosphere needs to be maintained and operational. As most of the NGOs have their existing programme on education and particularly other development programme, they should maintain and mainstream these efforts into their regular programme;
3. With the technical assistance from AAB, national level partners along with their field level partners can take initiative to record and documents all lessons gained and good practices achieved from the project. Otherwise all memories will be lost. This documentation will greatly help them for future use and replication;
4. CEF partners can organize another workshop with an aim for stock taking purpose Where they can review their own progress and identify the gaps and unfinished work;
5. The partners also can explore for other left out powerful group of stakeholders to involve them in their activities. Potential groups are may be women activist group, trade unions, children groups and other influential professional groups.
6. Still there is enough scope for CEF Management Committee to share and discuss the issues of CEF initiatives and achievements with other development partners i.e. donor agencies. It will create a positive impact on other donor from which a strong cooperation within the community may be established to ensure one track approach in ensuring favourable policy by the GOB for quality education.

## **Literature and Documents Reviewed:**

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3. Strategy paper of CEF Bangladesh- April 2003
4. Strategy paper of CEF Bangladesh- 2004
5. Midterm review of CEF Bangladesh
6. Roles and responsibilities of CEF Entities, consultation draft, 2005
7. Strategy paper of CEF Bangladesh- 2005
8. CEF Bangladesh 2006 Plans
9. CEF Bangladesh 2007-8 Plans
10. CEF M&E Framework
11. End of Project Evaluation – Guidance Note
12. End of Project Evaluation Framework
13. CEF GEEP M&E Framework
14. CEF Brochure
15. All Publications available of CEF Partners
16. All training Manuals
17. All project Reports from partners to CEF Secretariat